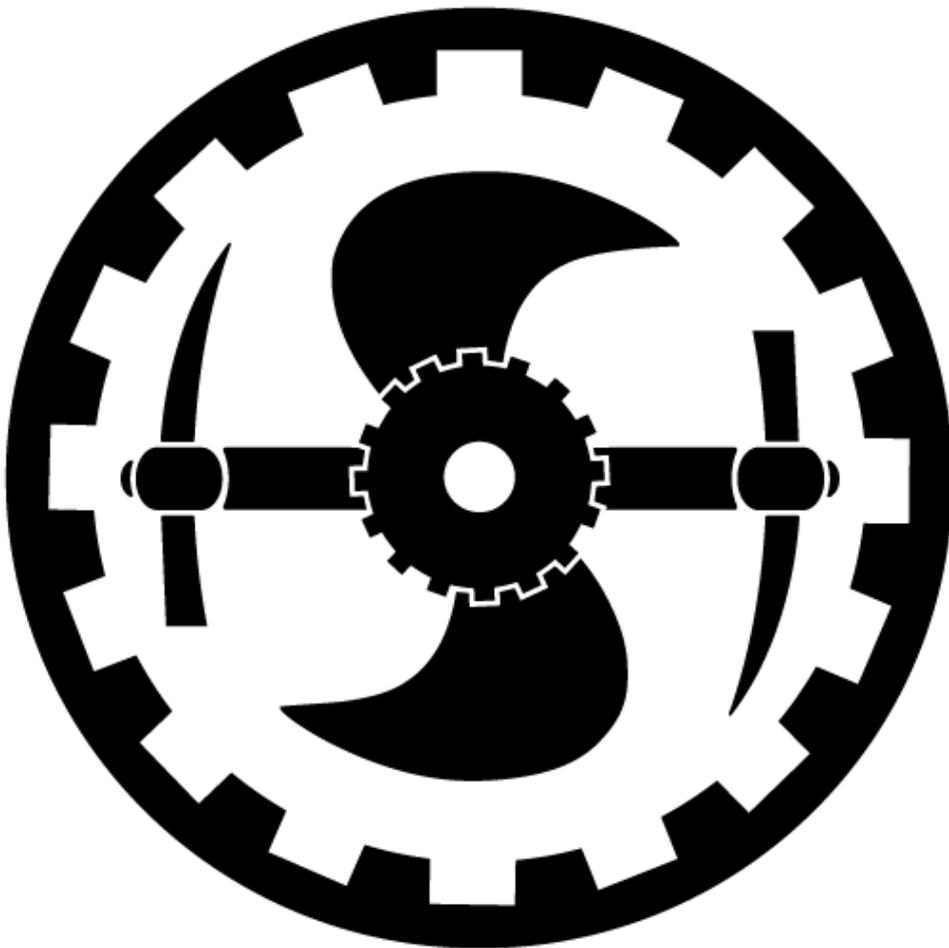


***THAMES STEAMPUNK  
FESTIVAL  
NOV 9-12 2016***



**Report to Economic Development Committee  
Feb 2017**



Steampunk on Parade; Photographer John Sprague

## Overview

The Thames Steampunk Festival is a high concept event, held over one long weekend, designed to appeal to a known market group - Steampunks - with a high growth potential. The Festival packs a whammy for Thames because it offers visitors a weekend escape fantasy close to the four main population centres of Auckland, Whangarei, Hamilton and Tauranga; capitalises on Thames' existing tourism assets.

Thames makes up its own version of steampunk within this creative genre - edgy, feral and 'Mad Maxish'. Each year the festival changes – as events change and local and visitor participants add their unique take on the genre.

All the events are designed to take advantage of Thames' many and diverse attractions. Thames is already steampunk personified because of its proud Victorian heritage. The steampunk genre provides a hook to entice festival visitors to sample Thames' artisan food and crafts; café culture; antique and retro shops; salvage and recycling yards; frontier hotels; and unique heritage sites – all while they enjoy their weekend of escapism and fantasy.

The 2016 festival exhibited exponential growth; word of mouth from festival goers from previous years appears to be one of the main ways of attracting new participants and audiences as does the festival Facebook page, which is proving to be an excellent ongoing marketing tool. Also, the festival continues to attract return party-goers. The expectation is that the 2017 festival will also grow from 2016.

The majority of visitors came from the Coromandel Peninsula and within a 150km radius of Thames which is the prime domestic market of the festival. However, people came from as far away as the South Island, Wellington and New Plymouth as well as the USA, UK and Australia. The international market has untapped potential; particularly in places where Thames has historical connections.

This year's Thames Steampunk Festival planned for November 9-12 will be extended from three days in 2016 to four in 2017, recognising the potential from additional marketing of the Thames 150 celebrations and current responses from the festival's Facebook page. The latter indicates that the steampunk market has not yet reached saturation.

Building on this already solid base, organisers will offer more and new events to cater for anticipated growth while maintaining the intimate and atmospheric nature of the event.

The new expanded line-up will include a meet and greet and concert in the park; two steampunk banquets, burlesque shows and two steampunk balls targeted at different audiences (“sucker punch” and ‘formal’); a steampunk parade, art car show and market; a vintage street circus and carnival; a steampunk breakfast, morning tea at the Thames Museum and lunch; family fun at the small gauge railway and picnic at the park and much more. Talks will again add inspiration and interest to this high compression event.

Authenticity will not be compromised; nor will the community- focused Steampunk Circus which, as a free event, brings the community together for fun and celebration and gives the weekend its vibrancy, character and colour.

A strong marketing campaign in 2016 contributed to the success of the festival. The most important change was in the institution of social media marketing which sits alongside traditional marketing. An active Facebook page and Website continues contact and conversations throughout the year as steampunks form personable and inclusive groups. They want to be involved in helping to create this year’s festival.

Another important component of the marketing strategy is capturing striking, eye-catching images. Steampunk is a highly visual art form and the marketing spinoff from great images cannot be underestimated; images from 2016 will be used in feature articles and drip fed onto Facebook during the upcoming year as teasers to promote the 2017 festival.

Selfies and other images by visitors and locals alike are self-perpetuating and replicating through social media and go around the world. These provide the best recommendation that the festival can achieve and are free.

Also, in recognition of Thames 150 celebrations and the amazing artistry of local and guest artists who have participated in the past three years of steampunk activities, organisers plan to produce a commemorative steampunk coffee table book.

Steampunk continues to have a widespread appeal and attracts a following from professionals working in film, special effects, photography, fashion, gaming, wearables, literature, sciences, technology, engineering, recycling and eco-

sustainability. It is cross cultural, cross generational, cross gender and cross political affiliation; the challenge now is not so much how to reach these different audiences but how to manage the expected influx of visitors and local residents who want to take part.

There are steampunk communities in most countries of the world. This year's Thame' 150 year celebration of the opening of the goldfields will offer the ideal opportunity to attract international tourists from places with steampunk communities which also have a historical connection to Thames or to the gold rushes of the 19<sup>th</sup> C (such as San Francisco).

Sustainability of the Thames Steampunk Festival is the big question moving forward. Thames Community Board consultant's, Visitor Solutions, have identified the Thames Steampunk Festival as one of the six pillars of promotion for Thames and it is likely that a steampunk presence all year round will act as a focal point for community culture and help make Thames a destination town in its own right. These are likely to be key ingredients for a sustainable future.

## Highlights of the Thames Steampunk Festival 2016

- Tracy's Steampunk Ball – 200 tickets; **sold out to capacity** (within a three weeks of ticket availability)
- Two Burlesque Shows – 100 tickets per show; both **sold out to capacity**
- Steampunk Circus and Street Carnival - **growth in numbers** (estimated participants 2000+ attendees; up approx. 500 from last year; funds raised by community groups by selling food)
- Steampunk On Parade/ Punk Your Ride Display/Steampunk market -- more floats and walking participants than expected; **major draw card for locals and out of town visitors; stall holders from as far away as Wellington and New Plymouth.**
- Steampunk Music Hall (**new event; 75 tickets; sold out to capacity**)
- Academy of Future Past art discourse - **attendees to capacity; 20 to 25 attendees** at School of Mines
- Steampunk Tea at the Museum; highly successful new event; \$1200 dollars raised for the Thames Museum
- Seagull Centre Steampunk Costuming Workshops successful as was the steampunk sculpture art competition and auction.
- Steampunk breakfast at GBD; guests there throughout the morning.
- Production of 2017 Thames Steampunk Calendar

## Media Coverage (Highlights)

Thames provides authentic 19<sup>th</sup> century settings for photography, videography and film which contribute to the ongoing success of the festival. In exchange for the opportunity to shoot and recognition of their work, three semi-professional photographers assisted with the 2017 Steampunk Calendar and a professional photographer was engaged to shoot portraits at the steampunk ball which were provided free to participants.

### Pre-Festival Publicity

*'Letting Off Steam'*. Shed Magazine Dec 2015/Jan 2016: 6-7 (Double page feature with photographs).

*'Tomorrow as it might have been'*. RV Magazine. March 2016 (4 page feature article and web video)

*'Steampunk Nautilus A Float'*. Western Leader. Oct 11 2016 (front page).

*'Magical Photoshoot and Calendar Photoshoot for Steampunk'*. Hauraki Herald Sept 30 2016. Front page and p.14.

*'Full Steam Ahead for Thames Festival'*. Hauraki Herald Nov 4 2016 p.9  
also *'Junk Art'* Our Place feature.

*'Steampunk The Thames'* Network Thames Newsletter 18 Oct 2016 p.3.

*'Full Steam Ahead for Festival'* Network Thames Newsletter 9 Nov 2016 p.1

Grahamstown Gazette. Nov 2016. (Steampunk feature edition).

*'HerSpace'* Book by Marilyn Jesson. Published Nov 2016. Features two Thames steampunk artists.

### **Post-Festival Publicity**

*'Out and About'*. Steampunk Parade Photofeature. Hauraki Herald Nov 18 p.4-5.

*'Steampunk Hub Plan'*. Hauraki Herald. Jan 6 front page article.

RNZ Live interview (and pod cast) with steampunk artist, Gin Clay. Jan 14 10.30 am

### **Survey results:**

An online survey of festival goers and an offline survey with forms left in event venues for festival goers to fill out elicited poor responses despite us offering an attractive incentive. For this reason, organisers called a public meeting in Thames in December 2016 after the festival to get constructive feedback from locals.

Main findings included:

- Request for more family oriented events and babysitting services
- Local notification of when tickets are on sale online
- Preferential access to tickets by a membership (of some kind)
- Need for more family oriented events and babysitting services

Many locals missed out on tickets and were disgruntled.

A call for comments was put out recently onto Facebook and 43 comments were received immediately. This would suggest that steampunks like an unstructured

approach to feedback and are happy to help; they want to feel up close and personal and that their input will make a difference. Chat not surveys; co-creativity is the buzz word for 2017.

From these Facebook remarks we know that many people have already pre-booked their accommodation; that many people planning to come to the festival in 2017 have come before (for some this will be their third time) and that people are coming in groups – with either friends or family. Also, people are choosing a variety of accommodation options – campgrounds, motels, hotels or family and friends. One accommodation provider was booked out for 2017 before the 2016 festival was over.

### **Main Street Retailers**

The response of some main street businesses in Thames has been positive in the main yet many are still slow to realise the potential and cater for the influx of visitors. Fewer retailers dressed their windows in 2016 compared with 2015; it would still appear that organisers still have to encourage them individually for them to take part.

Response to an online survey of local businesses was poor despite encouraging them to participate at a *Business After Five* meeting. There also seems to be still a lack of understanding of what steampunk means and how businesses can capitalise on its benefits even though this information was provided to them via a pre-festival Network Thames newsletter.

In Shortland (away from the main hub of the festival) Reed brothers sold out of spray paint and hardware; Crystal Ball had a great weekend and sold an expensive window item which had been around for a while; Brew said they had an “awesome” weekend – they were involved for the first time in hosting events (Meet and Greet and Music Hall). The Mad Burger sold out of burgers.

Two members of Totally Thames and Thames Business Network attended the first Steampunk The Thames Committee meeting of 2017 and plan to help bring on board mainstreet businesses for this year’s festival.

## Facebook Statistics January 11- February 18 2017

As of the last 28 days, of 1700 Facebook fans 73% are women and 26% are men.

### Age Demographics of Fans

Age Profile	Women	Men	Age Profile	Women	Men
13-17yrs	4%	1%	45-54yrs	21%	7%
18-24yrs	6%	2%	55-64yrs	11%	5%
25-34yrs	11%	4%	65+yrs	5%	2%
35- 44yrs	15%	5%			

### Country of Origin of Fans

38 different countries represented (top 10 as below)

New Zealand	1395	Brazil	8
USA	126	Mexico	6
Australia	55	France	6
United Kingdom	43	Germany	5
Canada	10	Thailand	3

### City or Town of Origin in NZ

Thames	157	Christchurch	26	Whagarei	11	Katikati	9
Hamilton	104	Paeroa	24	Whangamata	11	New Plymouth	9
Auckland Reg	*94	Tairua	23	Waihi	10	Whitianga	9
Tauranga	87	Puriri	18	Tapu	10	Te Aroha	9
Wellington	29	Rotorua	17	Dunedin	10	Coromandel	8
Waikato	28	Ngatea	12	Napier	9	Palmerston North	8

\*Auckland region and suburbs (the latter not listed separately above) accounts for 435 fans. A reasonable (but untested) assumption could be made that festival visitors from within NZ are probably represented in the same proportions as Facebook fans

## **Lessons Learned from 2016 Thames Steampunk Festival**

### **Need to Cater for Anticipated exponential growth of visitor numbers for 2017**

All ticketed events sold out in 2016; one within three weeks of release of tickets online. We will extend the 2017 festival from three days to four and bring on additional events (Suckerpunch Ball; Wild West Soiree; Concert in the Park; Steampunk Cocktail Making; another Banquet; Steampunk Luncheon and more) to cater for the anticipated increase in numbers of visitors. We will also approach businesses in town to encourage them to free ride on visitor numbers i.e. Pubs; Cafes; Embassy Theatre amongst others to make sure that entertainment is available to all visitors. New events will also help keep the festival fresh and exciting.

### **Preferential Online Sale of tickets**

Many local residents felt disadvantaged because they missed out on Ball tickets. For 2017, tickets will go on sale to preferential customers two weeks before being made available to the general public on August 1. Email addresses gained from online ticket sales and competition entries need to be entered into centralised database system.

**Efficacy of free online marketing** – has been effective so far but it is now time to step it up in terms of online images, content and advertising. Also free online can only take us so far – there is now the need to “purchase” existing Steampunk audiences with website banners, advertising, emails lists etc. and tap into the event, convention, makerfaire and fantasy markets overseas particularly in countries linked to Thames by our gold and kauri history (i.e. UK; Australia and western seaboard of USA).

### **Continued need to capitalise on Thames heritage as our unique selling proposition and strengthen relationships within our heritage community.**

The festival takes place within living history. There is the opportunity to reinterpret our history through steampunk and gain new audiences for our heritage sites which are amongst the best in the country. For example, this year, Thames Museum experienced “an avalanche” of visitors to their Steampunk Tea Party and made more revenue on the day than on any other in recent history. Visitor numbers were also up for Thames School of Mines and the Goldmine Experience and the Rock Shop made its best sales to date.

**Continued need to contract professional photography and videography** services so we have no copyright issues and the images can be used by Destination Coromandel and TCDC Communications as well as ourselves at no

additional cost. The steampunk calendar for 2017 has again proved to be an exceptional marketing tool – calendars were given as gifts in NZ and overseas and as a thank you to key stakeholders and sponsors.

**Need to strengthen TCDC Communications/Destination Coromandel/Event Organiser collaboration.** Destination Coromandel extended our reach to the tourism industry and TCDC to ratepayers and absentee ratepayers (*Summertime Magazine*). Also advice and mentoring by staff over a number of years has been extremely useful. However, we missed marketing opportunities last year because of high workload on unpaid volunteers. This year will have increased marketing pressures brought on by Thames 150 and more assistance is required.

### **Burnout of committee members**

Stress due to responsibility for new health and safety requirements, unreliability of newly trained volunteers; unpredictability of visitor numbers and concomitant increased work overload despite the hiring of a part-time events coordinator in 2016 will necessitate the need for organisers to purchase professional security and traffic management services as well as more events coordination for 2017.

### **Succession Planning and Sustainability**

Visitor Solutions, employed by the Thames Community Board to look at ways Thames can promote itself better, has identified the Thames Steampunk Festival as one of the six pillars for Thames as a destination. They have also recommended that there be a permanent steampunk presence as a way to attract visitors to Thames all year round. We have identified a need for a long term sustainability strategy for the festival as some of the current members of the Steampunk the Thames Committee will not carry on after the 2017 festival and advise that a FTE position be created to coordinate the festival and headquarters.

**Piggyback on Eco-activism.** In the USA, steampunk is expanding beyond the maker movement (Maker Faires) and free expression art (Burning Man festival in the Nevada desert) into the realm of DIY activism and sustainability in response to key global issues of peak oil and climate instability and environmental degradation. Choice TV has a themed segment around reuse and upstyling. This means that steampunk is a zeitgeist and should continue to be popular in the foreseeable future.